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1 The Celebrity Metronome

I am on the treadmill at the gym trying to loose fat, increase my muscle, and harden my body like a wrestling Mickey Rourke. In front of me are a row of plasma TV screens all switched to different channels with their sound turned off. On each and every channel there is a celebrity show being aired: Judge Judy, E! News, an action flick starring Bruce Willis, a cable cosmetics show fronted by a television personality I know the face of but not the name, a Rihanna music video, an episode of Two and a Half Men, a local news bulletin anchored by a celebrity journalist, and a replay of a Barcelona soccer game where the demi-god, Lionel Messi, scores a hat-trick.

As I run my eyes switch from one screen to the next, glancing at the row of celebrity figures before me. As my pace quickens, the TV screens take on the enchanted form of a celebrity metronome, my own perception caught in a regular and regulated swing. I see modern life itself gripped by the metronome's fixed beat, by the quiet pulse of auratic bodies that fill the swinging screens. I see the celebrity metronome beating across all of time and space, bringing to the world the 'everywhere' of celebrity culture. This I tell myself is the age of the celebrity metronome. And I run more quickly.

I Will Always Love you

Ask yourself these framing questions about Whitney Houston's death on 11 February 2011:

How did you first hear about her death?

Where did you go to confirm the details, to learn more about the tragic event?

Was it through Facebook or Twitter, on a mobile device as you travelled through town?

How did you respond, who did you talk to, or where did you post about her death?

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Where did you hear her songs being played and images of her celebrity circulated?

Did her songs sound out on radios, tablets, and mobile phones; in shopping malls; and on music channels, so that her soprano voice seemed to permeate all around you?

Did you follow the outcry that greeted Sony raising the download price of Whitney's anthem, *I Will Always Love You*?

What type of narrative about her life emerged across the media?

How was Bobby Brown portrayed?

Were race, drugs, and religion a core part of the rise-and-fall narrative trajectory employed to define Houston's life and death?

What types of emotional reactions did the media countenance?

Did you feel *moved or manipulated* by the media representation of her death?

Why did she dominate the news, the front pages of magazines, tribute shows, the posts and tweets that rolled off Facebook and Twitter over the period from her death to her funeral?

Why did Whitney Houston's death seem to matter?

For the most part, in answering these questions you will see that Houston encapsulates what celebrity involves, and how it functions like a mechanical metronome moving in and between media platforms, social interactions, and ritualised events, with similar stories, representations, reactions, and emotions being aligned and activated. In a very real sense, Whitney's death is produced, scripted, given a media representation, and is understood to be felt in particular heightened ways by fans and consumers.

Whitney Houston's death might be best described as a concentrated 'flashpoint' event when 'a particular celebrity completely dominates media coverage, producing an excessively focused global public' (Turner, Bonner, and Marshall, 2000: 6). For example, on the day of her death *The Sun* (News international, UK) newspaper led with, 'TROUBLED superstar Whitney Houston was found dead in a hotel room bath after two nights of heavy partying, it has been claimed', while *Fox News* reported, 'Whitney Houston, who reigned as pop music's queen until her majestic voice and regal image were ravaged by drug use, erratic behaviour and a tumultuous marriage to singer Bobby Brown, died Saturday night. She was 48'. Both reports set in motion how Houston's death will be framed and represented: talent and success wrecked by addiction and abuse; a rise-and-fall trajectory that involves the recognition of her greatness followed

by grandiosity, wayward diva behaviour and a doomed relationship with a fellow star (Bobby Brown), racially stereotyped as the 'bad buck' of the piece.

Such was the significance given to her death by the media, and such was the concentration by them on fan identification and the subsequent mourning period, that Houston became the centre point of news and current affairs discourse. The coverage focused on personal tragedy, and confessional and affective responses, as it was imagined to have impacted upon Houston, and on the people touched by her death. In fact, at this time one would have had to disconnect from the social world not to have met or perhaps felt Whitney's death so pervasive was the media coverage and the call for common communion.

Celebrity matters because it exists so centrally to the way we communicate and are understood to communicate with one another in the modern world. Celebrity culture involves the transmission of power relations, is connected to identity formation and notions of shared belonging; and it circulates in commercial revenue streams and in an international context where celebrated people are seen not to be bound by national borders or geographical prisms.

The notion of celebrity, of whom might be a celebrity, and of the issues, concerns, and pleasures that it raises are readily accessible to everyday conversation. People willingly give their opinions on celebrity in all sorts of political, social, and domestic contexts. In fact, if one was able to tune one's ear into café and bar conversations, mealtimes at work, playground huddles, radio broadcasts, the chatter of the social media; or if one was to hone one's eyes onto bedroom walls, magazine-filled coffee tables, designer and perfumery shops, all manner of goods and services, and the broad output of television and cinema, then one would find celebrity sounded out and visualised large. And this sounding is like the constant beat of a metronome, and this vision is like its regulated swing.

The material and cultural evidence of celebrity, then, is everywhere to be seen and heard. For example, as of the 30 May 2012, Lady Gaga had 25 million fans (her 'Little Monsters') following her daily tweets. She tweeted: '#25milliontweetymonsters wow! I'm officially feeling like the luckiest girl in the world today'. These little monsters cross age, gender, class, and race boundaries; they come from all four corners of the world; and the interaction with Gaga fulfils significant individual and cultural needs, particularly around the theme of alienation and disenfranchisement since she proclaims that she looks after, and speaks to and for, the marginalised in society.

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Celebrity exists at the centre of media and cultural life. It is found in the political arena, the literary circuit, and the boardrooms of big business and software companies. Celebrity is found wherever elevated figures can be foregrounded as heightened, charismatic, and talented people who warrant or demand our attention, and who can speak to or embody the needs, desires, and fears that sit at the core of modern life. The question of what celebrity constitutes is seemingly an easy one to answer and yet beneath its obviousness lays a deeper and more complex set of issues, debates, and dilemmas. This is a monograph dedicated to exploring the vexing but fascinating intricacies of celebrity culture. Journey with me.

What Is Celebrity? I Am (Not) Celebrity

If one was to visit any high street in almost any part of the industrialised world today and asked 'ordinary' people the question, 'what is celebrity', there would be general agreement to the answers given: they are famous people; you see them in films, on the television, on YouTube; and out in public, often at glamorous events. You can read about them online, and in magazines, fanzines, and newspapers. They are often connected to brands, and advertising campaigns, for any number of products and services. A celebrity is someone that for the most part leads a glamorous and wealthy life, and they are especially talented. Or, alternatively, they are undeserving of their fame, simply being well-known for being well-known (Boorstin, 1992). One can watch celebrities perform in their site-specific talent arena such as the concert hall or sports stadium, or at a red carpet entrance on a film's gala opening night. One can follow their lives through biographies and diaries, and in real time, at any time, through the social media. This ubiquity and proximity allows fans to get to intimately know a celebrity and to interact with, and gossip about, them. Celebrities are desirable and desiring; they exist as models of perfection, and yet they are also often damaged, toxic figures that are immoral models of imperfection and consequently are bad for us in some way. There is too much of them, since celebrities dominate the news and as such 'trivialise current affairs' (Gitlin, 1997: 35).

In asking ordinary people what is celebrity, one would undoubtedly reveal that there is a great deal of cultural knowledge about what it constitutes, that it has major political, economic, and cultural ramifications, and that it exists in a sea of contradictions and tensions.

The opinions on celebrity would be proven to swing this way, then that, forming a metronome modulating inside of people, shaping their perception of what the modern world means to them. Everyone has an opinion on celebrity since it is the actual material out of which contemporary life is experienced and understood, for better or for worse.

In academic terms, the term celebrity is used to define a person whose name, image, lifestyle, and opinions carry cultural and economic worth, and who are first and foremost idealised popular media constructions. According to Rein, Kotler, and Stoller, 'a celebrity is a name which once made by the news, now makes news by itself' (1997: 14). Celebrities exist in the eye of the media, are often adored by their fans, and are valuable commodities in terms of their use and exchange value. They are 'idols of consumption' (Lowenthal, 1961), and promote the purchasing of commodities through lifestyle choices and product endorsement.

For example, Charlize Theron is an A-listed Hollywood film star who attracts funding for any film project she is connected with, and in turn has a fan base who will go to see the films that she appears in. After the Oscar-nominated success of *Monster* (Jenkins, 2003), Theron earned \$10,000,000 for starring in both *North Country* (Caro, 2005) and *Aeon Flux* (Kusama, 2005). According to *The Hollywood Reporter's* 2006 list of highest-paid actresses in Hollywood, she ranked seventh, behind Halle Berry, Cameron Diaz, Drew Barrymore, Renée Zellweger, Reese Witherspoon, and Nicole Kidman. The average gross of her films is \$28,935,398.

Theron has a pre-constituted star image that suggests certain repeat behaviours and values; she brings to her starring film roles performative promises and these are raised as expectations by the marketing machinery and through the way her fans consume her. At the level of signification, Theron registers as an idealised white female beauty (a blonde bombshell) but she is also represented as feminist and authorial. Theron is both to-be-looked-at and takes on challenging roles and gives authentic, realist performances. She stars in Hollywood blockbusters such as *Hancock* (Berg, 2008), which operate through a desiring gaze of her body, and she takes roles in films such as *North Country* (Caro, 2005), which define her as an activist, fighting injustice and (sexual) harassment.

Theron is readily reported on, her public and private life a constant newsworthy source in the popular media. Again, this is bifurcated coverage. On the one hand her support for and commitment to women's rights, animal welfare, and same-sex marriage is

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well documented. On the other hand, she is reported on through the lens of sexual objectification and fascination. For example, when her mobile phone was hacked and 'nude' pictures were circulated in 2012, Theron's identity was sexualised even if this was under the mask of media indignation.

In terms of commercial sponsorship, Theron's endorsements centre on products that make use of her beauty and glamour. She advertises Dior perfume (signed 2004), Uniqlo Heattech's designer clothes (signed 2010), and was associated with Raymond Weil's luxurious Swiss watches (2005–2006), appearing in a series of adverts that connected her elegance and beauty with the product in question. For all these global products, Theron is represented to be glamorous, sensual, and, with the Dior brand, particularly sexual.

For the j'adore Dior campaign, in one notable magazine advert, a bronzed Theron emerges from a golden sea, as she strides towards the imagined reader. Her blonde hair is swept back, and wet, and the golden, strapless dress she is wearing reveals her flawless skin. Her hourglass body shape, and the perfected sensuous symmetry of her body, is meant to mirror the perfume, the perfume bottle, which occupies the right corner of the image-advert. Theron is 'made' of it, is found in the perfume's very essence; in this advert there is a shared sexual chemistry constituted as a sexual fantasy enveloping perfume and celebrity.

Theron, then, exists in all the interconnecting sheets that define celebrity, linking identity, desire, gender perfection, emulation, news, gossip, and commodification across the texts and contexts we find her represented in. She is the epitome of a certain *type* of celebrity.

Celebrity Types

According to Chris Rojek (2001), one can divide celebrities into distinctive types. First, there is ascribed celebrity based on lineage and 'whose status typically follows from blood-line' (17). Members of royalty, the aristocracy, and heirs and heiresses have ascribed celebrity status. Second, there is achieved celebrity which 'derives from the perceived accomplishments of the individual in open competition' (18), and which would include film stars, pop stars, sports stars, leading artists, inventors, elite scientists, and grand philanthropists. Third, there is attributed celebrity, which is, 'largely the result of the concentrated representation of an individual as noteworthy or exceptional by

cultural intermediaries' (18). Reporters, publicists, photographers, personal trainers, and chat show hosts, amongst others, highlight these attributed individuals because of single acts of bravery, invention, difference, certitude, and honour. Or else, their accumulative extraordinary actions and activities are considered to warrant attention and reporting on. Attributed celebrity can also emerge because of what are considered to be heinous acts and infamous behaviour, such as the atrocities undertaken by a serial killer. Fourth, there is the celetoïd, which is 'any form of compressed, concentrated attributed celebrity' (21). For Rojek,

The desire for fame now far exceeds talent, accomplishment or skill. The upshot of the present condition is the emergence of the *celetoïd*: a person who acquires short, intense bursts of media time simply by dint of being recognized by TV producers as coveting and chasing fame in a sufficiently determined way. (2009)

The 'accidental celebrity' (Turner, Bonner, and Marshall, 2000) would also fall into this category of the celetoïd. Thrust into the limelight because of an incident or event outside of their control, they become newsworthy for a distinctly limited period of time.

For example, in January 2009, Captain Chesley 'Sully' Sullenberger became an accidental celebrity when he landed US Airways Flight 1549 on the Hudson River after its engine had stalled after hitting a flock of geese on take off. Sully was thrust into the media spotlight and heralded a hero for his successful landing of the aircraft. Stories about his training, his family life, and his American-born 'exceptionalism' dominated the US news outlets, culminating in him being ranked second in *Time* magazine's 'Top 100 Most Influential Heroes and Icons of 2009'. Accidental celebrities are generally ephemeral, the length and reach of their fame limited to the size of the accidental event that first thrusts them into the spotlight.

Questioning Types: Fusion Figures

The idea of celebrity types is, nonetheless, a problematic one, not least because one can argue that celebrities always exist as *blended* constructions where their status and discursive meaning constantly shifts depending on context, event, and media specificity. Prince William has ascribed celebrity status as a member of the British Royal family,

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and this is particularly represented as such during state ceremonies and official engagements. However, he also has attributed celebrity status in relation to his skills as a flight lieutenant with the Search and Rescue Force. His six-week tour of the Falklands was widely reported in terms of heroic duty. Finally, prior to his marriage to Katy Middleton, Prince William was a regular feature of the tabloid press in terms of his play-boy ways and wild partying. He was in effect, in this representational stream, a celetoid. And yet not quite, it is the conjunction of ascribed and attributed status, situated in textual and contextual environments, that render celebrities such as Prince William fusion figures, where ritualised events and specific media sites foreground particular aspects and qualities of the fêted individual in question.

Star Struck

There is also the issue of media and role specificity that complicates the taxonomy of celebrity types. The film, sports, and rock star may well need their own celebrity categories because of the way they signify and are culturally positioned, while the television personality can be understood to be a (domestic) celebrity figure with specific, defining characteristics (Bennett, 2011).

Stars often warrant the greatest attention, attract particularly strong levels of attraction and idolisation, and they exist at the apex of the commercial and commodity revenue streams. Soccer star David Beckham, for example, was named richest UK sportsman in the *Sunday Times* (2012) with earnings of over £160 million. The event-like status attributed to a Beckham appearance positions him as a particularly idolised and famed individual. As Ellis Cashmore suggests

The Beckham fairy tale ... grew out of this fertile soil, a context in which people had lost trust in established traditional forms of authority, in which they no longer looked to monarchic, military, religious or political leaders for guidance and in which they found gratification in immersing themselves in the lives of glamorous and flamboyant celebs. (2004: 2)

In a similar vein, Chris Rojek suggests that celebrities such as David Beckham 'have filled the absence created by the decay in the popular belief in the divine right of kings, and the death of God' (2001: 13).

Beckham, in fact, has been captured in religious style poses, has a well-publicised tattoo of *Jesus on way to the Cross*, and has undertaken ambassadorial work that allow him to play the role of healer and life-giver.

If we take the example of the contemporary film star, Christine Geraghty has usefully suggested that they can be read in terms of three distinct forms, only one of which is connected to celebrity. First, there is the star-as-celebrity whose fame exists primarily in terms of the reporting of events in their leisure and private life, relegating the films they appear in to secondary significance. As Geraghty argues, 'it is the audience's access to and celebration of intimate information from a variety of texts and sources which are important here' (2007: 101). Second, there is the star-as-professional who has a stable star image that cements itself in film roles that call on similar performance cues, in repeated and recurring ways. Geraghty argues that Harrison Ford is one of the most successful professional stars since 'Ford is absolutely consistent in performance, and enjoyment of a Ford film very much depends on watching the contrast between easy expressiveness of his body movements and the impassive face with its limited range of expressions' (102). Third, there is the star-as-performer who is primarily noted for their acting talent, the skill of their performances, and the work undertaken to make a performance shine. Geraghty says that the recent shift to performance-driven stardom is in response to celebrity culture and to the way cinema has been digitised and ever more reliant on special effects and artifice. The star-as-performer humanises film in the age of simulacra. If one was to take the tragic example of Australian actor Heath Ledger, one can see how the question of authenticity of the performance, the implicit method behind the star figure, was integral to his star signification and the way viewers and fans responded to him. Ledger was understood to be an authentic actor with stardom acting like an albatross around his beautiful neck.

Ordinary Television Personalities

The television personality can arguably be considered to also be a category in its own right. John Ellis has provocatively argued that television presents audiences with a personality or 'someone who is famous for being famous, and is famous only in so far as he or she makes frequent

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television appearances' (1992: 96). John Langer has suggested that the television personality is a relatively stable identity that emerges in and between the flow of programming and genre segmentation (1981). They should be contrasted with film stars because

Whereas stars emanate as idealizations or archetypal expressions, to be contemplated, revered, desired and even blatantly imitated, stubbornly standing outside the realms of the familiar and routinized, personalities are distinguished for their representativeness, their typicality, their 'will to ordinariness', to be accepted, normalized, experienced as *familiar*. (1981: 355)

The idea that television personalities are ordinary and attainable, who go by their real names in authentic or realist environments, suggests a particular site-specific category with important ideological and cultural considerations. As James Bennett (2011) argues

Television personalities must be understood as actively involved in the promotion, and maintenance, of particular meanings about what it means to be 'ordinary' across a range of identity formations: from national identity to race, sexuality to gender. (191)

If one were to examine the *Oprah Winfrey Show* and Winfrey's personality, one would see its logic being tied to the ordinariness of her presentation of the self, one built on stability and familiarity and a high degree of intimacy. The structure of the show, its segments and bridges, its confessional and therapeutic mode of address, and Winfrey's common touch with guests and audience alike suggest a particular interpersonal and dialogic configuration of the television personality. However, wrapped around Winfrey's television persona are the complex markers of race, gender, sexuality, and class since she both embodies and reads or self-reflects on these as part of the show. Invited guests and audience are also asked to comment on them, often for progressive political reasons. Winfrey is very much one of us, she

[t]ouches audience members a lot, cries and laughs, and they touch, laugh and cry back. These exchanges signify an empathy that is traditionally feminine, but also feminist in its insistence on the 'personal', and that is largely free of the inflections of authority and sexuality mixed in with the male hosts' touching. (Squire, 1994, 66)

Consequently, the way in which the television personality connects with political issues leads one to consider representation and identity as key criteria when considering the way celebrities are to be understood.

Celebrity and Identity

The idea of celebrity types needs nuancing in terms of class, gender, race and ethnicity, and sexuality. The celebrity occupies identity positions through which ideology and power relations are negotiated and articulated. The celebrity type, then, is a blended construction not simply because of fluidity in the way they occupy the stage, but because they are always given multiple identity positions that shape their status.

Serena Williams is a celebrity tennis player; she has achieved this position through skill and fortitude. She is also – depending on the context – a celetoïd, written about because of her bad temper, highly defined arm and leg muscles, body weight, and her spending power. As an achieving celetoïd she is also decidedly raced and sexualised by the popular media, her African roots used to fetishise her body, particularly her buttocks. As Coleman-Bell suggests

The media concentration on Williams's buttocks seems to confirm the way that race, gender and sexual deviancy and desire are aligned. Williams's sporting prowess is encoded as a form of sexual excess: she doesn't just play sport, she is sport. The representation of Williams's black sporting body is loaded with carnal connotations so that she becomes a compliant whore for the white imagination that she is centrally 'packaged' for. (2004, 199)

Celebrities are always connected to vexing questions about identity, they 'articulate what it is to be human being in contemporary society; that is, they express the particular notion we hold of the person, of the individual' (Dyer, 1987: 10). The type of individual that gets celebrated however needs to be individuated, they need to be seen to exist as something unique or special, and this is best encapsulated through the way the celebrity body is made to signify, to be the material out of which identities and subjectivities emerge. Such celebrity individuation, however, may open new, challenging, and intimate ways to understand why and how they matter to people.

Celebrity Bodies

Celebrities are always embodied individuals, and one of their key signifying capabilities is communicating through the senses, through sensorial representations. Rather than their being celebrity types, then, one might better express their meaning in terms of celebrity bodies – through their sensorial and corporeal manifestations. Skin, hair, lips, eyes, touch, sweat, movement, arms, legs, and torso are concentrated upon by the visual media, and the senses seem regularly heightened or super sensitivised, ensuring that celebrities are *especially* carnal beings.

From a negative position, the celebrity body may emerge as a particularised sensory stereotype, such as the way Serena Williams has become a modern version of the vivacious Hottentot Venus, a racialised figure used at the turn of the nineteenth century to suggest an innate sexual difference between black women (enlarged labia, buttocks) and white women. By contrast, white female celebrities often are framed as having ideal bodies that are to be attained and attainable to those who work them into pictures of health and slender fitness. These thin, toned, white celebrity bodies are centrally involved in reproducing the ‘tyranny of slenderness’ (Chernin, 1994) that haunts popular media culture more generally. According to Maltby, Giles, Barber, and McCutcheon’s study of teenagers and adolescents

Findings suggest that in female adolescents, there is an interaction between Intense-personal celebrity worship and body image between the ages of 14 and 16 years, and some tentative evidence has been found to suggest that this relationship disappears at the onset of adulthood, 17 to 20 years. Results are consistent with those authors who stress the importance of the formation of para-social relationships with media figures, and suggest that para-social relationships with celebrities perceived as having a good body shape may lead to a poor body image in female adolescents. (2005: 17)

There is, however, a more general and positive phenomenological perspective from which to understand the conceit that the celebrity is an embodied figure that needs to be *experienced*; as one that requires a recognition of a level of intimacy or intimate engagement that is not reducible to representation and performance. That is, to engage with the celebrity requires feelings, the activation of the senses, and the mobilisation of affects. For example, I cannot see or hear Bruce Willis without also sensing sweat, physical exertion, movement, and more

recently and in synaesthetic contradiction, embodied melancholy and existential inertia – slowness or a slowing of affects as he has aged. One could profitably put together taxonomy of celebrity bodies in terms of sensation and feeling.

Marilyn Monroe (cotton, milk, sugar, softness, water)

When concentrating on celebrity types as a framing taxonomy one also forgets to look at what I would like to term celebrity aesthetics or the ways in which celebrities are made meaningful through aesthetic design and narrative and performative choices; through the techniques of lighting and styling, colour and fabric choice; and through appearing in heightened, utopian environments. Examining the spectacular celebrity body in these enchanted places would reveal something particular about identity and desire, particularly if one was to simultaneously situate the reading in particular historical contexts. For example, Marilyn Monroe's sensorially transmits what it is like to be a perfected white woman in a 1950s America dealing with racial difference. She creates an 'experience' of desirable white womanhood for an America undergoing radical social and political transformation. Her body moves freely, it registers as soft and appealing, the embodiment of girl-like optimism and womanly sensuality; it is full and fecund, but vulnerable and fragile, always in corporeal tension with itself.

Celebrity Aesthetics and the Celebaesthetic Subject

It is through these latter contexts – celebrity embodiment and aesthetics – and in relation to the imagined fan or consumer, that I would like to introduce one new term to the field of celebrity studies, borrowed from Vivian Sobchack's definition of the cinesthetic subject in her book *Carnal Thoughts* (2004). For Sobchack, the cinesthetic subject is the one that 'feels his or her literal body as only one side of an irreducible and dynamic relational structure of reversibility and reciprocity that has as its other side the figural objects of bodily provocation on the screen' (79). As Sobchack explains, the term 'cinesthetic' is meant to comprise the way in which the cinematic experience triggers and relies on both synaesthesia (or intersensoriality) and coenaesthesia (the perception of a person's whole sensorial being).

I think we can usefully define the feeling, sensing subject in front of the star or celebrity as the *celebaesthetic subject*. The fan and celebrity

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face one another as carnal beings in a dynamic, relational structure of reversibility and reciprocity, through which the senses are activated and the body is the organ through which a communion, a shared experiential relationship, takes place. Put rather simply, stars and fans communicate with one another in and through the activation of powerful emotions and senses. Let me draw on an illustration to help me better explain this.

The Crying Man

Sam Taylor Wood's *Crying Men* series took 20 male Hollywood stars and photographed them crying, emoting, in various intimate settings. One can, of course, apply the lens of artifice, of performance register and star image to these photographs as if they are singularly media representations. The photographs clearly exist in a commodity marketplace where Hollywood careers are being constructed and mythologised. Art, popular culture, and commodification mix and conjoin in these photographs, as does the star artist (Wood) who is the 'auteur' capturing these famed, masculine figures.

In a particularly affecting image of Daniel Craig one can read the emotion he expresses as part of his filmic image. Craig is the James Bond that cried, and there is a certain fragility to his eyes which speak the performative vocabulary of hurt and forlorn melancholy. For me though, as I conjure up my own response to seeing or feeling the photograph for the first time, there is something else about it that, to use Roland Barthes (1982) term, wounded me.

The photograph is beautifully shot; sunlight dances around the loft apartment setting and creates a shadow on Craig's face, and across his somber body. Craig, leaning forward, hand to lower face, is seated in a black leather chair. The foreground of the photograph is predominantly dark and thick. His eyes are red and swollen and bags of exhaustion half circle their raw edges. The image is a mixture of dry and wet; with the sun and the tears acting as affective registers of heat and water, heart and emotional outpouring. The hand that cups the lower face is one that would wipe away the tears or steady the convulsing face. They would be salty and sodden. The image is still but it moves. Craig's hair is messy, roughed up and the stare he returns is directed at the viewer/reader, at the photographer behind the camera. The stare is wrought, confessional, and it exists as intensity that is felt in *this* body, my body, as it experiences the stare in the moment of the first live encounter with it. It heats and floods

my emotions. I experience it synaesthetically (as light, elements, colours, tastes) and I see or sense the carnality of the image before me. Craig's physical and emotional self (hard and soft, masculine and homoerotic) scatters itself across the vibrations of the photograph. Little of this is accidental, of course, it is the stadium at work, the photograph's recognizable code, but some of what I experience though may well be crafted out of blocs of sensation and asemiotic registers of feeling.

Craig's pain desires and devours me as it eats away at his own self in the image. But the image or photograph affects me in another elemental way, like a knife through the primordial heart. This is the punctum of the photograph or to quote Barthes, in *Camera Lucida*, 'that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)' (1982: 26–27).

What is in this photograph that wounds me so, what object, trace, cloth, or texture resonates in the realm of the senses? I don't see it at first, can't see its point, and the points it leads to. Its significance a buried affect in a sea of melancholy. Then it hits me, it is the thick gold band on his curled finger – missing from my own finger, left in a bathroom dish somewhere, confirming the end of a relationship.

I can immediately feel the coldness of the ring, its absence on my finger. Craig's emoting body provides a synaesthetic and coenaesthetic symbiosis that takes me over. I/we exist in a dynamic relational structure of reversibility and reciprocity in which my senses are activated and my body is the organ through which communion, a becoming, takes place. Put simply, that is me crying in the picture, a becoming Craig, me crying before the picture, a Craig becoming me, an affecting outcome that can only be put into words now. I am a fan of Craig – there is something for me deeply affecting about his masculinity – and this acts as an opening which allows me to lose and find myself in the crying man series.

Julia Kristeva has suggested that when one attends an art installation it is the body that is being asked to sense the work, but not as an abstraction. Rather, 'one experiences the installation as a real experience that rises out of the encounter with its form, colour, volume, its internal and communicable sensations' (quoted in Bann, 1998: 69).

I would like to suggest that this might be the project or primary function of celebrity aesthetics: to explore the way celebrity activates our intensive registers, and reconnects us in newly profound and perhaps liberating ways with the social world. This aesthetic, sensorial thread and its liberating potential will be one of the recurring frames through which celebrity will be explored in this book.

But where did celebrity come from?

We Shall All Be Kings and Queens: The Rise of Celebrity Culture

How to best make sense of where celebrity began; to navigate how it has charted over human history; and how it is presently constituted? One of the difficulties in doing this genealogy is the ambiguity over terms, or the slight variations in related terms that are so often treated the same way. How might renown and infamy differ from celebrity, for example? Can one discern links or a chain of associative relationships across Western culture with regards to the narratives of celebrity? Are there epochal shifts, and if so why, with what consequences? There are two broad positions; the first speaks of continuities; and the second speaks of historical breaks. I shall now take each of these positions in turn.

Continuities

Renown and fame can be argued to have long histories, with their origins in ancient civilisation. If we look at the Latin root of the term celebrity we see that it derives from the word *celebritās* or multitude, renown, festal celebration, and is equivalent to *celebr-* (stem of *celeber*), or that which is often repeated. Fame, as Robert Garland argues, comes from the 'Latin word *fama*, cognate with the verb "to speak", an enduring characteristic that outlived a person's demise' (2005: 24). In their original usage both terms link celebrity and fame to public recognition built upon achievement or noteworthy behaviour. The idea that renown is spoken ('to speak') is related to the way notable people would be often discursively positioned to be the voices of reason and sound opinion. Renown occurs not only through oration but the display of wealth and power, and the physical presentation of the self in ritualised and performative settings. The philosopher Socrates, for example, is remembered as a remarkable figure through the way he delivered and presented philosophical truths to disciples and those under his study. The theatre or arena or court became the primary site for renown to be instigated.

However, this speaking sensibly and importantly must occur in front of an audience and be recorded and remembered. For renown to take root it must be written about or sketched; it must be retold in folk story and song; and it must be circulated fully within and across the culture of the time for it to have lasting impression. In these respects, Socrates

lives on as a figure of renown because of what others wrote about him, including Plato. On today's terms, publicists, cultural intermediaries, and journalists take a key role in the creation of renown, but this occurs alongside televised recordings, social media interactions, interviews, performances, and the responses from those who witness the celebrity in action.

Socrates is an interesting example to use because of the gaps and contradictions that appear in these writings about both his private and public life. In effect, Socrates embodies the tension that straddles the history of celebrity, in whatever form it takes, between what is imagined or reported to be real and authentic, and what is read to be artifice and construction. Of course, it is these very tensions in the circulation of renown that helps create and sustain the figure as worthy of significance and import. The enigma of Socrates is the fuel for gossip, intrigue, doubt, attraction, and repulsion; it is the crux of celebrity culture today as it was then.

One can suggest, then, that at least on one important level there is a strong link between the birth of renown and contemporary celebrity, and that they fulfil similar human needs. Tom Payne (2010) argues that idols or celebrities emerge because they fulfil both loving and hateful tendencies that all humans possess. The celebrity is to be adored but they are also to be destroyed since this ritual of loving, then hating, and then killing them provides a safe or symbolic space to play out essential and transhistorical desires and death drives. Celebrity is 'a systematic cycle of celebration, consecration and sacrifice' (51) whose ritualised narrative allows one to create immortalised figures that one can then safely destroy. Through identification with the celebrity, one can get to know perfection, and death, at a relative safe distance and without being consumed by either of them.

One of the key narrative arcs of the celebrity figure is the rise-and-fall trajectory. No sooner does the celebrity reach the heights and highs of success than they fall prey to drugs, booze, instability, and a career nosedive (see the discussion of Whitney Houston which heads this chapter). The drama of their rise-and-fall is played out in numerous media outlets, and is again scripted. This might be represented through the way their wayward body is witnessed stumbling out of a club in the early hours, or into limousines or taxis that whisk them away, their faces shielded from public view. This paparazzi shot becomes emblematic (repeatedly circulated) of their fall from grace. Or their decline is evidenced through how ill their bodies are shown to be, and which therefore bear the hallmarks of the slow slide to metaphorical

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death – the death of their celebrity status – and to a real death that may soon consume them. As consumers, as fans, we revel in the rise-and-fall story; contribute to its circulation; and we only get our full fix if both consecration and desecration takes place.

In terms of media representation, Lindsay Lohan carries the burden of such a trajectory. A notable child star and a Disney Princess, she is seen to fall from grace. As she entered adolescence, it is reported that she has begun to drink, take drugs, misbehave, and had a 'lesbian' relationship. This profile of damage is extended and connected to the reports on her having a criminal record for drink driving and for the need for her to enter a rehabilitation clinic. On 14 June, for example, Fox News reports, 'Drug Outbreak behind Lindsay Lohan Rehab Switch, Sources Say' (<http://www.foxnews.com/entertainment/2013/06/14/drug-outbreak-behind-lindsay-lohan-rehab-switch-sources-say/>), while Perez Hilton posts, 'Lindsay Lohan Wanted Out Of Betty Ford ASAP, Her "Safety And Sobriety" Were In Danger!!!' (http://perez Hilton.com/category/lindsay-lohan#.UbvjsJV_1pE).

Through these sequential, 'further falling down' frames, we watch her innocence fall away, and either take a moral stance, rebuking her, a sympathetic or empathetic line, or we take pleasure in her undoing, and we wait for death to consume her. Of course, the rise-and-fall trajectory for the celebrity can also have a further 'act', one where a resurrection or rebirth takes place, and the celebrity is seen to rise again, having cleaned up their act and learned from past mistakes. Britney Spears would be a celebrity who has risen after falling. This is not yet the case with Lohan. In the 2012 January edition of *Playboy*, Lohan is captured in a nude Marilyn Monroe inspired photo shoot, and she recently played Elizabeth Taylor in the television biopic, *Liz and Dick* (Lifetime, 2012). Lohan is reanimating herself in the bodies of dead stars who themselves had turbulent lives. Death envelops her present celebrity status.

Epochal Shifts and the Death of the Real

Nonetheless, rather than seeing continuities, a number of scholars suggest that there are epochal shifts in the history of celebrity. Fred Inglis, for example, sees a clear shift between fame and the development of celebrity in the eighteenth century in Europe and North America. For Inglis, fame is based on birth, wealth, skill, and power

while one can become a celebrity by ‘the mere fact of a person’s being popularly acknowledged, familiarly recognized, attended to, selected as a topic for gossip, speculation, emulation, envy, and groundless affection’ (2010: 57). Inglis argues that first the Enlightenment, and then the Romantic period and the Industrial Revolution, paved the way for celebrity culture to emerge since it set in motion a number of massive transformations that re-shaped modern life. This included the rise of the cult of the individual; the development of consumerism, fashion, new leisure, and entertainment streams; the rise of the popular press, the invention of cinema; and a philosophical turn to emotion which favoured feeling, desire, and passion over rational choices and rationalist paradigms.

For Inglis, London, Paris, and New York are the key cities in this enabling of modern fame, and Lord Byron the epitome of the shift to the celebrated individual since he embodied its new modes of address. Byron was written about in gossip-centred newspaper columns and his life became a work of art to be celebrated. For Clara Tuite, Byron heralds in the age of literary celebrity and with it new modes of production and communication between writers and readers

a figure distinguishable from the merely famous author by his or her status as a cultural commodity produced by highly-developed capitalist relations of production and consumption and a fully industrialized form of print capitalism. With the rapid expansion of literary markets from the late eighteenth century, works of literature were no longer produced for a small audience, often known to the author, but for a vast, anonymous body known as the reading public. With the emergence of the public, a radically altered relationship between writers and readers created the conditions for the culture and economy of literary celebrity, which overcame this distance and established an intimacy between the author and reading public. (2007: 62–63)

In relation to Byron, this intimacy manifested itself in the way romantic love was both writ large across his oeuvre, and was carried into his very public relationship with Carloline Lamb, rendering it ‘a form of publicity’ (Tuite, 2007: 62), and as a way of offering access to his most intimate desires, feelings, and wants. One can see a relationship between this literary, romantic intimacy, and the modern forms that are carried by celebrities in the social media, and by emotional outpourings in confessional contexts such as the television chat show.

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Inglis sees some cultural benefit to the age of celebrity since it can provide social cohesion and collective meaning. However, he also sees a rapid decline in the worth of celebrity over the course of the twentieth century, since it becomes devalued, an empty vessel that now operates at the level of spectacle and capitalist consumption. Daniel Boorstin takes up a similar position when he suggests

The hero was distinguished by his achievement, the celebrity by his image. The celebrity is a person well known for his well-knownness. We risk being the first people in history to have been able to make their illusions so vivid, so persuasive, so realistic that we can live in them. (1992; 49)

Boorstin argues that we live in the age of the 'pseudo-event', manufactured by the media, organised around mythical events of importance and which take the place of, or stand in for, social reality. For Boorstin, we live in and through banal media representations only, and the celebrity is the epitome of the 'human pseudo event' since they are 'fabricated on purpose to satisfy our exaggerated expectation of human greatness' (ibid.).

Mark Rowland is even more critical of contemporary celebrity culture, again locating a rupture from the Enlightenment period onwards, out of which, 'new variant fame' or *vfame* emerges, a state in which 'we are constitutionally incapable of distinguishing quality from bullshit' (2008: 91). For Rowland, *vfame* is akin to disease, or mental illness, and consequently Western culture is similarly contaminated by it and has undergone a 'severe dementia' (26). *Vfame* is a symptom of a Western world where Britney Spears can be considered to be 'just as good as Beethoven' (103), but where in truth such comparisons are 'truly facile' (104). In fact, Rowland considers that cultural relativism has led to a state in which ordinary people can no longer make critical sense of their lives, too busy are they with consuming empty celebrity signifiers and comparing the merits of, say, *Hello!* magazine with the *E!* entertainment channel.

One can posit an alternative argument about contemporary celebrity, however: one that contextualises criticisms of it in terms of a nostalgia for a past that never really existed, and which sees it in terms of a greater democratisation of access to media representations and discourses. For example, Leo Braudy argues

The longing for old standards of 'true' fame reflect a feeling of loss and nostalgia for a mythical world where communal support for

achievement could flourish. But in such societies that did exist, it was always only certain social groups who had an exclusive right to call the tunes of glory, and other visual verbal media were in the hands of a few. (1986: 585)

Graeme Turner identifies what he terms the demotic turn in celebrity culture which involves the ‘increasing visibility of the “ordinary person” as they have turned themselves into media content through celebrity culture, reality TV, DIY web-sites, talk radio and the like’ (2010: 2). For Turner this demotic turn has contradictory outcomes. On the one hand, increased participation in the media doesn’t necessarily correlate with increased power and authority. On the other hand, it does ensure a visibility and a centring of themes and issues not hitherto given media oxygenation.

There is a concern that the superficiality of celebrity activity reduces the opportunity for meaningful political participation for ordinary people as the media centre gets filled with the trivial, the neo-liberal, and the late capitalist dreaming that stands in the way of critical, public engagement. In Stuart Hall’s recently released *The Kilburn Manifesto* (2013), he suggests that celebrity is at the cultural heart of the development of the possessive and aspirational individualist, concerned with self-development as it can develop within or through the engines of late capitalism. Hall contends

Neoliberalism’s victory has depended on the boldness and ambition of global capital, on its confidence that it can now govern not just the economy but also the whole of social life. On the back of a revamped liberal political and economic theory, its champions have constructed a vision and a new common sense that have permeated society. Market forces have begun to model institutional life and press deeply into our private lives, as well as dominating political discourse. They have shaped a popular culture that extols celebrity and success and promotes values of private gain and possessive individualism. They have thoroughly undermined the redistributive egalitarian consensus that underpinned the welfare state, with painful consequences for socially vulnerable groups such as women, old people, the young and ethnic minorities.

But this may not be the case, in fact, there is good evidence to suggest contrary impulses and connections can and does occur through celebrity culture. Joke Hermes (1995), for example, has examined the

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pleasure that women readers get from gossip magazines that are often heavily centered on celebrity news. She found that readers used gossip for two productive reasons; first, as an extended family through which items could be shared; and second, as a melodrama, that could be related back to everyday life. Both reasons gave readers a collective and inclusive environment to talk through the issues facing them. Gossip about celebrities, then, is considered to be a powerful tool to engage with the serious issues that women faced in their everyday lives. It has feminine and feminist possibilities that counter the patriarchal way that public discourse is often shared and communicated.

The rise of the social media may also be a productive instrument in the way celebrities interact and are interacted with today. Celebrities can emerge outside of the corporate streams they very often are connected to, and the communal groups that emerge around a celebrity can directly impact upon the way that celebrity negotiates their fame and public presentation. The social media have produced a much more fluid environment for the circulation of celebrity figures and so power and authority are clearly no longer able to be transferred from top to down, but in new carceral networks that allow them to flow in irregular and new ways. Similarly, celebrities can use the social media for activist reasons, aiming to bring a political issue into the spotlight and produce collective momentum in trying to change it. As *The Guardian* reported,

Josie Long (32,214 followers), a stand-up comedian who supports the UK Uncut movement, finds Twitter an essential forum for debate. 'I do feel chuffed that I've got that many people on my Twitter, and I can disseminate things', she says. 'I feel quite proud that I'm letting people know about protests and actions and things like that'. (Benedictus, 2011)

Politicians of course have increasingly turned to the social media to launch their campaigns and to develop electable profiles, particularly with young voters. The co-mingling of celebrity qualities with political standing has begun to shape politics on a global scale. As I have elsewhere written (2010), Obama used the social media to connect with and mobilise his vote, employing his slogans of change and hope within the context of media technologies and media content that were built on change and hope metaphors. This alignment was particularly attractive, offering a synergy between the needs of the individual, social media organisations, and users who embraced Obama's mantra of social change.

The Celebrity Metronome

I would like to make one final comment on the here and now of celebrity. First, the modern media enable us to consume a celebrity outside of any linear order. Through the processes of media convergence, media portability and mobility, and time shifting in television-viewing habits and the simultaneous erosion of time-driven schedules, a celebrity's past and present can be watched or read or viewed in any number of sequences, in any order a fan so wishes. A celebrity's past and present can be re-ordered and with it the ideological weight that may have sat with them at any given particular time. As their own linear relationship to time is unlocked, so is their capacity to simply stand for an ideological position.

Age and the ageing process becomes something quite different in this unhinged multi-versant universe. The rise-and-fall celebrity trajectories previously addressed in this chapter and which are often used to mark a celebrity's career path can no longer have the linear certainty that they might have once had. A celebrity's body can seem to co-exist in different physical states, and they can be re-animated, brought back to life through the digital hologram, as Tupac was for the 2012 Coachella musical festival. Celebrities not only live beyond death through the recycling of their image, works, but in and through a digital media that can constantly return us to their living present. In this respect, Lohan is the epitome of this recycling and re-examination process. One can access all points of her career at any one time, she can fall before she can rise again as a child star; and we can pull pieces from this bricolage and foreground what is most important to us.

Celebrities are liquid figures because time can no longer be theirs, or their cultural intermediaries, to hold firm. They exist across numerous temporal and spatial dimensions. I can watch Charlie Sheen in one half-hour segment of *Two and Half Men* looking younger than he does in the next, out of sequence, half-hour segment that immediately follows. This can be then be 'interrupted' by Ashton Kruchtner performing the role. I could Google Sheen and see him appear in 20 different simultaneous states and go to old tweets where he was still married or expressing that he was in madly love with a 'hooker'. I can be given the task of archivist to give his life order but I may very well allow or be compelled to allow the collapse of time to match my own experience of modern life liquid – transient, ephemeral, fluid, cut up, and mixed.

Celebrity now embodies the condition of liquid modernity – it presents us with figures to identify with but asks us to see or experience

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these embodied ties as loose, free-floating. And yet not quite, liquid celebrity is contained within a meta-framework, held in the power of a mechanical device that regulates and governs its waters. This is the celebrity metronome, sounding out, swinging its single hand, over everything that exists in the world today.

Zac Efron (deep blue ocean, sculpted marble, musky, Earl Grey tea, smooth and solid).

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